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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: OMAN'S SUBTLE PRESSURE ON CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: A. MUSCAT (WOMEN'S SEMINAR); B. MUSCAT 1089

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Schmierer, Ambassador, Department of State,
Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S/NF) During the week of November 16, Oman's Internal Security Service (ISS) questioned civil society leader Khalid al Haribi about his recent activities to promote women's rights in Oman. The encounter rattled al Haribi and showed that the GoO has figured out that his corporation is performing NGO-type work. Although the women's seminar was without question Tawasul's most contentious activity to date (Ref A), the ISS showed much greater interest in the women's Majlis training that Tawasul orchestrated (Ref B). Al Haribi stated that the ISS knew "everything" about the training he had conducted and repeatedly grilled him about "whose ideas these were." Both the ISS and others have questioned whether the U.S. Embassy put him up to this. (Note: Al Haribi is a former embassy employee who founded Tawasul after four years as the embassy's senior political/economic LES. End Note.) Al Haribi, obviously frustrated, commented, "Can't they believe that I have these good ideas?" When it was pointed out to al Haribi that the Sultan was supportive of efforts to further empower women, he said "I think he is the only one who is..."

¶2. (S/NF) The Government's contact with al Haribi was one in a series of escalating communications he has had with the GoO. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Interior had a relaxed conversation with him about his plans to train women to run for the Majlis. At the time, al Haribi thought that his interlocutor was personally supportive of his efforts. The November meeting, apparently sparked by complaints from the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), was followed by the ISS speaking with al Haribi's brother, Dr. Rashid al Haribi, a member of the Majlis al-Shura. Although Rashid did not reveal all the details of the conversation to his brother, he did suggest that Khalid might want to "have a plan B" and "think about getting another job."

¶3. (S/NF) Comment: It is obvious that Tawasul's days of operating under the government's radar are over. While al Haribi was visibly shaken by his encounter with the ISS, he also believes that he is working in the best interest of his country and will likely continue to pursue his goals. The ongoing encouragement and informal mentoring he has received from in country representatives of U.S. NGOs receiving MEPI funding has provided vital international perspective and the support required to keep him focused on his goals. End Comment.
Schmierer